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SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL COOPERATION AND THE CLEARING-HOUSE MECHANISM

The experience of the Global Environment Facility in support of the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity

Note by the Executive Secretary

1. At the request of the secretariat of the Global Environment Facility (GEF), the Executive Secretary is circulating herewith, for the information of participants in the fifth meeting of the Conference of the Parties the report of GEF on its experience in support of the clearing-house mechanism of the Convention on Biological Diversity.
2. The report was prepared in response to paragraph 5 of decision IV/13 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention, in which GEF was requested to:

"Evaluate at the end of the clearing-house mechanism pilot phase the experience of [its] support for developing countries' activities, to consider additional efforts to meet the increasing interest in taking part in and having access to the clearing-house mechanism, including in regional networking, and to report to the Conference of the Parties prior to the next meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice."
3. The report is being circulated as it was received from the GEF secretariat.



Global Environment Facility

January, 2000

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY
IN SUPPORT OF
THE CLEARING HOUSE MECHANISM OF THE CONVENTION ON
BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY

I. BASIS FOR THIS REPORT

1. Decision IV/ 13 of the Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity requested the GEF to:

“(c) Evaluate at the end of the clearing-house mechanism pilot phase the experience of [its] support for developing countries’ activities, to consider additional efforts to meet the increasing interest in taking part in and having access to the clearing-house mechanism, including in regional networking, and to report to the Conference of the Parties prior to the next meeting of the Subsidiary Body on Scientific, Technical and Technological Advice.”

2. This report has been prepared as a direct response to this last request. In preparing it, the GEF Secretariat has relied on feedback from the three Implementing Agencies and the Convention Secretariat, the *Independent Review of the CHM Pilot Phase*¹, and the results of a survey of GEF focal points carried out in 1998 (GEF/C.12/Inf.17).

II. BACKGROUND

3. When launching the pilot phase of the clearing house mechanism (CHM), in Decision II/ 3, the Conference of the Parties requested the GEF to:

“explore the modalities of providing support through the financial mechanism to developing country Parties for capacity-building in relation to the operation of the clearing-house mechanism and report to the Conference of the Parties at its third meeting.”

4. In response, the GEF presented a report to the third Conference of the Parties, in document UNEP/CBD/COP/3/36. In this report, it was suggested that the GEF would expand its operational criteria for biodiversity enabling activities to include country level support for participation in the clearing house mechanism. On the basis of this report, Decisions III/ 4 and III/ 5 asked the GEF to implement its revised operational criteria, focusing in particular on the following critical elements:

“(i) capacity building for the purpose of the clearing house mechanism, including training in information systems technologies that will allow developing countries to take advantage of the recent developments in electronic communications, including the Internet; and

(ii) country-driven pilot projects focussed on priority areas identified by the Conference of the Parties which would enable developing countries to begin to implement the main features of the pilot phase of the clearing house mechanism.”²

¹ UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/5/Inf/1

² Decision III/ 5, ‘Additional Guidance to the Financial Mechanism,’ paragraph 5 (c).

III. CAPACITY BUILDING FOR PURPOSES OF THE CHM

5. In order to implement the first part of this guidance related to capacity building, the GEF's revised operational criteria were finalized and disseminated in June 1997. The revised criteria aimed at providing the basic hardware, software and training needed in developing countries to benefit from the use of electronic communications and the internet. The criteria identified three categories, or groups, for GEF support. Groups I and II included Parties which had a sufficient telecommunications infrastructure and potential for internet connectivity. Group I Parties would receive direct assistance in the form of hardware, software, funds for initial internet access, and training in the use of the internet. Group II would include those countries where internet access is not readily available, but could reliably be provided through a cooperative agreement with the local World Bank or United Nations office. Group III was reserved for countries which lack internet connectivity, and would benefit more from computer hardware using CD-ROM, software, and training.

6. As of December 1999, the GEF has funded 69 CHM projects: 51 of these were supported through "add-on modules" to ongoing enabling activities (EA) and another 18 were included in the original enabling activity request.³ A total of US\$804,580 has been approved and countries have received on average US\$11,661 to support their national CHM focal points. All of these projects fall under the Group I heading described in paragraph 5 above. No projects were requested under the Group II or III criteria. This suggests that most Parties primarily view the CHM as an internet-based operation. Country-specific data regarding direct GEF financing for national CHM assistance is included in the appendix.

7. Responses from the Implementing Agencies indicate that most of this funding has been allocated for basic computer hardware, software, and training. This includes assisting several CHM focal points in obtaining access to the internet for the first time; providing basic training for the establishment of biodiversity-related web sites; and leveraging funds from other organizations and institutions. Such a result is consistent with the recommendation in the *Independent Review* calling for a "minimum technological threshold" in order to maximize participation in and access to the global CHM network.

8. In addition to providing tools and training for more effective communication, an important measure of determining the effectiveness of this funding requires a review of how these tools are actually being implemented to support the aims of the Convention.

9. Among the achievements in this regard have been increased access to external information on biodiversity science and policy. CHM focal points are now - some for the first time - downloading information on biodiversity issues and participating in listserver discussions that were previously unavailable to them. As a result, both they and their

³ The add-on module was created to allow those countries which had previously submitted their enabling activities request to receive additional funding for CHM activities. Countries which had yet to submit their EA request could simply include CHM support in their proposal.

immediate colleagues working in biodiversity are more informed about the various discussions taking place in the context of the CBD and are in a better position to share their research and lessons learned with colleagues around the world.⁴

10. Several countries, including Iran and Mexico, have utilized GEF CHM funding to create web pages where national reports and action plans on biodiversity are freely available. Others, such as Cape Verde, Kazakhstan, and Cameroon, have used GEF support to leverage additional resources for biodiversity information management.

11. The overall results of this process indicate that GEF support has helped in achieving the limited first objective of providing developing countries (where needed) with the basic wherewithal to begin participation in the CHM through the electronic medium, in keeping with Decision III/ 4 and paragraph III/ 5, paragraph (d) (i).

12. In addition, some CHM focal points have begun using GEF support to compile national biodiversity databases and network with national and international institutions and conventions, NGOs, universities, government agencies, and individuals involved in biodiversity-related efforts.

13. While the overall GEF experience with the CHM has been positive, some constraints were reported. These include difficulty in obtaining reliable phone or electrical power service in some developing countries; an inability to meet the cost norms established for CHM components of enabling activity proposals⁵; obtaining sufficient resources for paying recurring internet fees; and networking within countries.

14. In other cases, delays have arisen from a lack of GEF focal point endorsement or difficulty in identifying suitable institutions for training national staff in using computer software and the internet.

IV. ADDITIONAL GEF SUPPORT FOR THE CHM

15. GEF support of developing countries activities under the CHM has been a useful catalyst for increasing access to and communication of international biodiversity issues and concerns. But there is understandable eagerness now to move on to the next stage(s) of using the CHM for implementation of the Convention. While the GEF stands ready to support this next stage of efforts, it looks forward to COP decisions on what the future strategy for the CHM will be, particularly the *Strategic Plan of the Clearing-House Mechanism (1999 – 2004)*,⁶ based on an evaluation of the pilot phase. The GEF will then be in a position to clarify operational modalities to implement the second part of Decision III/ 5, paragraph (d) which requests GEF support for

⁴ Among those listservers and databases most commonly accessed are Bionet, Bioplan, and INFOTERRA. This is in addition to improved access to the GEF, CBD, and other biodiversity-related web sites.

⁵ This was reported to be a particularly challenging aspect for some small island nations.

⁶ UNEP/CBD/SBSTTA/5/Inf/2

“country-driven pilot projects focussed on priority areas identified by the Conference of the Parties which would enable developing countries to begin to implement the main features of the pilot phase of the clearing house mechanism.”

16. In anticipation of decisions in this regard by COP 5, the operational criteria for GEF’s enabling activities have recently been revised to provide additional expedited funding (over and above the initial support) which may be used, if so decided by the Party, for further support of the country-level activities related to the CHM. Additionally countries are consistently encouraged to coordinate with their national level CHM focal points to include specific components on data management in biodiversity projects.

V. GEF SUPPORT FOR REGIONAL/ SUBREGIONAL ACTIVITIES

17. The experience to date with proposals for regional CHMs (for example, in an effort made by a group of Latin American countries) suggests that such mechanisms require a high degree of coordination among member states to ensure that the proposal has strong support and does not duplicate or conflict with other ongoing efforts. The task will no doubt be simplified when formats and mechanisms for preparing and running such projects have been agreed upon.

18. However, GEF support for activities related to the clearing house mechanism are by no means limited to enabling activities. There has been a far greater GEF outlay on information and data management components in substantive projects than on direct support for the CHM described above. Without attempting to list all the GEF projects that have supported regional/ subregional data management or institutional capacity building for this purpose, a few examples will serve to illustrate the potential for regional cooperation in CHM-type activities, in the context of biodiversity projects:

a) the *Management of Indigenous Vegetation for the Rehabilitation of Degraded Rangelands* project in Botswana, Kenya and Mali (GEF allocation \$ 9.05 million) includes the establishment of a regional arid zone database as a tool for conserving globally significant biodiversity in three African dryland areas;

b) the *Conservation Priority-Setting for the Upper Guinea Forest Ecosystems in West Africa* project in Cote d’Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Sierra Leone, (GEF allocation \$0.74 million) will provide national decision-makers with access to accurate, up-to-date scientific information on the ecosystem’s biotic resources. It will strengthen national level capacities and human resource development while providing a framework for cross-national and regional integration.

c) the *Regional Environment and Information Management Project (REIMP)* in Cameroon, Central African republic, Congo, Equatorial Guinea, Gabon, Congo DR, (GEF allocation \$4.3 million) establishes a demand-driven, action-oriented environmental database for the tropical forest region of Central Africa to support decision-making and build national capacity for environmental monitoring, land-

use planning and conservation priority-setting. There is strong emphasis in the project on creating an integrated, standardized regional information network for data-sharing, on connecting data suppliers and users to the electronic highway, and on developing specific products desired by end users.

d) the *Inventory, Evaluation and Monitoring of Botanical Diversity in Southern Africa : A regional Capacity and Institution Building Network* project in Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia and Zimbabwe (GEF allocation \$ 4.7 million) will build the effective capacity of staff in these countries to inventory, evaluate and monitor some 30,000 species of flowering plants and ferns. The projects will directly expand the information base on the distribution and status of the region's botanical diversity, and will allow such assessments to be performed by individuals and institutions within the region.

e) the project *Institutional Support for the Protection of East African Biodiversity* in Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda (GEF allocation \$ 10 million) includes the enhancement of regional collaboration through the support of training and information-sharing activities.

f) the project supporting *Conservation Strategies for Rhinos in East Asia* for Indonesia and Malaysia (GEF allocation \$ 2 million) will help to create a database for analysis of rhino habitats.

g) the project *Regional Support for the Conservation and Sustainable Use of Natural Resources in the Amazon* in Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guyana, Peru, Suriname, Venezuela (GEF allocation \$ 4.5 million) will develop a regionally compatible geographic information system and enhance the capacity of national institutions in these countries to manage protected areas and develop regional strategies.

VI. THE BIODIVERSITY DATA MANAGEMENT PROJECT

19. One particular effort that deserves close attention is GEF's Biodiversity Data Management Project implemented in the Bahamas, Chile, China, Costa Rica, Egypt, Ghana, Kenya, Papua New Guinea, Poland, and Thailand, assisted by UNEP and World Conservation Monitoring Center. The Biodiversity Data Management Project was designed to enhance the capacity of developing countries in data and biodiversity information management to support the implementation of the CBD. Supported by a \$4 million GEF grant, it financed surveys to identify sources of biodiversity data, creation of information networks, and development of biodiversity data management plans in ten countries.

20. A final evaluation of the project was carried out in mid-1998 jointly by UNEP's Evaluation & GEF Coordination offices and the GEF Secretariat's Monitoring & Evaluations Team. The evaluation concluded that the project was very appropriate for

the participating countries. It allowed them to document information on biodiversity that was available, and to identify where data was stored, how it was managed, and the conditions under which it could be accessed. Support for intra-country linkages was a major success of this project. It created a greater awareness of the wide variety of databases already existing in the participating countries, and increased possibilities of data sharing between organizations, particularly among government agencies and research institutions and universities. Along with the CHM, these accomplishments will go a long ways towards ensuring that data management efforts are successfully incorporated into future GEF and CBD-related projects.

VII. CONCLUSIONS

21. In order to develop capacity in developing countries for participation in the clearing house mechanism in pursuance of Decision III/ 5, paragraph (d) (i) of the COP, the GEF provided direct support through 69 projects. Recipient countries uniformly view the CHM as an internet-based exercise. This initial GEF support has enabled countries to use the internet to participate in the CHM. Some countries faced technical/ institutional difficulties. Others faced a challenge in providing for the recurring costs of internet access and internal networking.

22. The GEF has revised its operational criteria for enabling activities to accommodate additional country-driven activities for purposes of the CHM. The GEF has also provided substantial funding for CHM-type activities in regional/ subregional biodiversity projects. It continues to encourage countries to build CHM activities into regular GEF projects.

23. It is expected that the CHM Strategic Plan for 1999 – 2004 to be approved by the Parties will provide a framework for countries to prepare national and regional proposals for further GEF support relating to the CHM.

APPENDIX: DIRECT GEF SUPPORT FOR THE CLEARING HOUSE MECHANISM⁷

⁷ As of November 30, 1999.

No	Country	Total US\$	Implementing Agency	CEO Approval (m-d-y)	Comments
1	Algeria	14,000	UNDP	11/17/98	
2	Antigua & Barbuda	14,000	UNDP		
3	Bahamas	14,000	UNEP	4/16/98	
4	Belarus	12,300	UNEP	1/15/98	in EA
5	Belize	7,000	UNDP	12/7/98	
6	Benin	13,950	UNDP	6/23/98	
7	Bolivia	6,000	UNDP	9/29/98	
8	Bulgaria	10,200	UNDP	9/14/98	in EA
9	Burkina Faso	13,984	UNDP	4/23/98	
10	Burundi	11,085	UNDP		
11	Cameroon	13,000	UNEP	2/11/98	
12	Cape Verde	14,000	UNDP	3/4/98	
13	C.A. Republic	13,600	UNDP		
14	Chad	13,970	UNDP	12/7/98	
15	Comoros	14,000	UNDP		
16	Congo	13,500	UNDP	10/26/98	
17	Côte d'Ivoire	13,800	UNDP	5/19/98	
18	Czech Rep.	12,000	WB	12/15/97	in EA
19	D.R. of Congo	12,710	UNDP	11/18/98	
20	Dominica	7,150	UNDP	11/23/98	
21	Dominican Rep	10,000	WB	4/16/98	in EA
22	Ecuador	5,900	UNDP	4/27/98	in EA
23	Egypt	14,000	UNEP	1/9/98	
24	Ethiopia	12,000	UNDP	1/27/99	in EA
25	Fiji	11,150	UNDP	7/14/98	
26	Gabon	12,750	UNDP	5/19/98	
27	Gambia	13,950	UNEP	4/16/98	
28	Grenada	5,020	UNDP	4/16/98	in EA
29	Guinea	13,450	UNDP	12/16/97	
30	Haiti	12,000	WB	2/24/98	in EA
31	Honduras	10,000	UNDP	3/17/98	in EA
32	Hungary	7,000	UNEP	10/29/97	
33	Indonesia	10,300	UNDP	11/18/98	
34	Jamaica	8,050	UNDP	4/16/98	in EA
35	Jordan & Pal. Auth.	12,500	UNDP	7/10/98	
36	Lebanon	9,500	UNDP	7/2/98	
37	Madagascar	10,000	UNEP	10/29/97	
38	Malawi	11,000	UNEP	11/10/97	
39	Maldives	12,206	UNDP		
40	Mali	13,140	UNDP	5/8/98	

41	Mauritania	14,000	UNDP	4/16/98	
42	Mauritius	12,300	UNEP	4/23/98	
43	Moldova	10,000	WB	3/12/98	in EA
44	Mongolia	8,050	UNDP	11/17/98	
45	Morocco	14,000	UNEP	6/5/98	
46	Mozambique	13,300	UNEP	11/10/97	
47	Niger	11,338	UNDP	11/10/97	
48	Oman	14,000	UNDP	12/16/97	In EA
49	Panama	14,000	UNEP	1/9/98	
50	Pakistan	10,600	UNEP	2/11/98	in EA
51	Papua New Guinea	12,000	WB	11/23/98	in EA
52	Paraguay	5,610	UNDP	8/26/98	in EA
53	Peru	9,250	UNDP	6/30/98	
54	Philippines	11,300	UNDP	2/18/98	in EA
55	Poland	11,000	UNEP	9/1/98	
56	Rwanda	13,950	UNDP	6/24/98	
57	Senegal	11,300	UNDP	2/25/98	
58	Seychelles	10,100	UNEP	10/29/97	
59	Slovenia	12,000	WB	3/4/98	in EA
60	St. Lucia	14,000	UNEP	2/3/98	in EA
61	Solomon Islands	8,580	UNEP	9/28/98	
62	South Africa	13,500	UNDP	8/26/98	
63	Sudan	14,000	UNDP	8/26/98	
64	Togo	11,300	UNEP		
65	Ukraine	14,000	WB	5/8/97	
66	Uruguay	13,837	UNDP	3/15/99	
67	Vanuatu	13,100	UNEP	6/10/98	
68	Vietnam	12,000	UNDP	6/16/98	
69	Yemen	14,000	UNDP	6/26/98	
	TOTAL (US\$)	804,580			
	Average (US\$)	11,661			